

Statement on Senate Action on the District of Columbia, Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill

November 2, 1999

Today, by a narrow margin, Congress completed action on a deeply flawed spending bill that I will veto. This bill is a catalog of missed opportunities, misguided priorities, and mindless cuts. It forces America's schoolchildren to pay the price for Congress' failure to make responsible choices. I will not let it become law.

The bill—which includes the Labor/Health and Human Services/Education appropriations measure—makes a blind, across-the-board cut that will hurt everything from national defense to veterans' programs, from education to the environment. It reneges on last year's bipartisan commitment to fund 100,000 teachers and reduce class size in the early grades, replacing this proven approach with a risky block grant that opens the door to private school vouchers. It fails to include a key accountability initiative to help turn around failing schools. And it shortchanges many other priorities, including efforts to enhance worker safety, expand child care, detect emerging infectious diseases, and protect Americans from the threat of bioterrorism.

This debate is not just about how much we spend but also how wisely we spend. I sent Congress a budget, for education, health care, and other programs, that invests in results and is fully paid for. But Congress continues to pursue an agenda of irresponsible cuts and ill-conceived allocations. The patience of the American public is wearing thin. It is time for Congress to put aside partisanship and make the targeted investments our Nation's future demands.

Remarks Following Discussions With Chairman Arafat and Prime Minister Barak and an Exchange With Reporters in Oslo

November 2, 1999

Middle East Framework Agreement

The President. Ladies and gentlemen, we have just completed a very good meeting. I feel that we have revitalized the peace process, and we've got these final status—the framework talks off to a very good start.

The two sides have not only named their teams; they have agreed that the leaders will personally continue to meet on a regular basis. They have agreed to work very hard to avoid public comments or actions which will cause enormous difficulty for the other side in the next 100 days or so when they're trying to come to agreement on the framework. And they have agreed with me that we might well have a summit at the end of this process if enough progress has been made to make us all believe that, in good faith, we can actually get an agreement at a summit.

Q. Is that the framework process, Mr. President?

The President. The framework process, yes.

Q. When will you have that summit?

Q. [Inaudible]—their intentions, though?

The President. Well, when and whether depends upon what we're doing. We have a very ambitious timetable here. I think the timetable is the middle of February that they've agreed to have the framework agreement. So you won't have to wait long for answers to the details. We'll all be in high gear between now and then.

Thank you very much.

Q. Mr. President, is this more than you expected to come out of Oslo? Are you surprised?

The President. I feel quite good about it. I feel very good about it. I'm very pleased by it.

NOTE: The President spoke at 6:50 p.m. at the U.S. Ambassador's residence. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Remarks to the American Embassy Community in Oslo

November 2, 1999

Thank you very much. Well, Mr. Ambassador, Doreen, Mr. DCM, Congressman Sabo, thank you for coming with us. And thank you so much, Secretary Albright, for all you've done to make this a safer, better world.

Now, Hermelin did not tell you the truth. [Laughter] He says, "Come to Norway. I guarantee you a standing ovation." That's why you don't have any chairs today. [Laughter] He did not even tell you the truth about how he got this job—this deal about, "Oh, I got to go to Norway, and I thought I hit the lottery." That's not what happened. [Laughter]

He called me and he said—you said, "Name one person in America who has done more for you than I have"—[laughter]—"just one." I said, "Hillary." [Laughter] He said, "You can't make her an Ambassador." So I said, "Well, what do you want?" He said, "I want to go to Norway." I said, "David, you can't even find Norway on a map." [Laughter] He said, "No, you have to appoint me to Norway." He said, "You know, the Oslo accords and the role they have in the Middle East peace process." I said, "Yeah, sure, of course, I do." He said, "I, David Hermelin, am the last remaining Norwegian Jew on the face of the Earth." [Laughter]

So even though it isn't true—[laughter]—hasn't he been good for the American Embassy? You know, one of the great joys of my life, because I've spent so much of it in public life, I'll be—when I leave on January 21st, 2001, I'll be moving out of public housing for the first time in 20 years. [Laughter] One of the great joys of my life is, I've gotten to meet so many thousands of people from all over the world, all over our country, from all different walks of life with all different slants on things and all kinds of different talents. And this man and his wife, his children, and his family are truly among the most won-

derful human beings I've ever met anywhere in the world. And I am so blessed that they have been with me.

I also want to say again to those of you who are Norwegian nationals, how profoundly grateful I am to His Majesty, the King, and to the Prime Minister and the Government and people of Norway for inviting me to come and for opening once again their hearts to the peace process in the Middle East and having this truly remarkable event today in honor of our friend Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin.

And for those of you who were there or who saw it on television, I'm sure you'll agree it was a very moving event. And I can tell you, I met just before I came here with Prime Minister Barak and Chairman Arafat, and I think that the event and the feeling of the people and the luncheon that followed really did help to put them in a good frame of mind as we kind of head for the last sprint toward getting a framework agreement on all these final status issues by next February. It will be very difficult to do.

The chances that we can do it now are dramatically increased in no small measure because we have had one more great gift from this small but remarkable and wonderful country. So I thank them very much for that.

I would like to thank all the people who are here, our career Foreign Service officers, beginning with you, Mr. Gundersen, and all the others who are here, people who have worked for the other departments of the Federal Government, the military people who are here. I'd like to thank the young musicians for providing our music today. Thank you very much. It was very good.

But I want to especially thank those of you who have given your life in service to our country. And I want reiterate and reaffirm what Secretary Albright said. You know, in my lifetime, literally in my lifetime, which, unfortunately, is getting older by the minute, our country has never before been in quite this position where we had the strongest economy in our history, where our social fabric was coming together, not being driven apart, where we have a very high level of confidence that we can do things.